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ABSTRACT

This research study used citizen profile data from the National Election Study surveys for the presidential elections years from 1980 through 1992. By crossing internal efficacy and trust indicators, the researchers hypothesized citizens would fit into four types: (1) the "Wary Monitors" have high internal efficacy and low trust with the highest attention to politics of any of the four groups; (2) the "Satisfied Citizens" will be the next largest group with high efficacy ratings and high trust; (3) the "Suspicious Uncertains" have low efficacy and low trust with lower levels of attention to politics than the previous groups; and (4) the "Contented Complacents" have low efficacy and high trust with the lowest amount of attention to politics. Results suggested primary impact of an individual's feelings of competence concerning political affairs lies with attention to political information. Implications for education are suggested. (EH)

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Caveat Civitas:
The Influence of Efficacy and Trust on Attention to Political Information

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Abstract

Individuals can be classified as high or low on trust in government and internal efficacy, yielding four categories: high trust/low internal, high trust/high internal, low trust/low internal and low trust/high internal. We argue each type has distinct behavioral consequences. Specifically, we theorize that the impact of one's internal efficacy on the quality and amount of attention to political information will be modified by one's level of political trust.

We expect that, all else equal, internal efficacy should be positively related to attention. The feelings of competence and familiarity with politics at high levels of internal efficacy should lead to greater attention than at low levels where those feelings and political ease are absent. However, when one's trust in government is incorporated, the picture is complicated. We hypothesize that among subjects high in internal efficacy, those with low trust in government--whom we label "Wary Monitors"--will be more attentive than those with high trust. Both feel competent, but the "Wary Monitors" mistrust the government and will thus pay even more attention to political affairs than those high on both dimensions, whom we label "Satisfied Citizens."

Among subjects low in internal efficacy, attention should be relatively low. However, some may maintain trust in the system. The result for these "Contented Complacents" should be levels of attention lower than those who lack trust in themselves and government--the "Suspicious Insecures"--who will feel compelled to "keep an eye on" their political leaders.

Caveat Civitas: The Influence of Efficacy and Trust on Attention to Political Information

Introduction

> I am convinced that those societies ... which live without government enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under the European governments. Among the former public opinion is in the place of law and restrains morals as powerfully as laws ever did anywhere. Among the latter, under pretence of governing they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate. This is a true picture of Europe. Cherish, therefore, the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress and Assemblies, Judges and Governors, shall all become wolves.
>
> Thos Jefferson, Letter to Edward Carrington, 1787, in Dumbauld p 65

Whether one argues that the public is important because government should be by consensus or if one argues that the public is important because its tacit support gives the ruling elites the legitimacy and authority needed to pursue their policy goals, it is clear that the consent and support of the masses is key to the functioning of democratic government. As argued by Arthur Miller in his discussion of the decline in trust, "[d]emocratic theory emphasizes voluntary consent as the basis of political obligation and legitimacy." Miller goes further to argue that "[d]emocratic government assumes -- indeed, requires -- widespread participation, political equality, the accountability of leaders and protection of the individual citizen's constitutional guarantees." (Miller, A., "Rejoinder" 989)

Throughout American political thought there have been those, such as Jefferson, who taking a positive view of human nature, expressed a belief in the importance of participatory politics because both the polity and the individual gain through this involvement. Participation creates good citizens, and citizens can be educated to take on their roles as good citizens. Every citizen should have the ability and the motivation to get involved in politics. Political efficacy -- the feeling that the individual can make a contribution -- is assumed; where it is lacking, civic

education should help foster it. All citizens should have a healthy skepticism, but fundamentally they should trust that the system functions to serve them.

There have been others who have argued that the citizenry should be divided into two classes: the elite and the masses. The former are expected to participate; the latter are not. The masses are supposed to trust the elites to govern. The simple argument is that the practice of governing is best left to elites who have more information and who have been trained for work in politics. The role of the masses is to lend support to the regime and the political system, and in so doing to maintain the legitimacy of the political system. It would be better, in such a system, if most people had fairly low levels of political efficacy. Moreover, it is important in such a system that people trust in their government, implicitly giving it support and legitimacy.

The extent to which individuals believe themselves able to influence government and to which they believe government to be responsive and trustworthy have been central themes in discussions of politics, specifically as they relate to the perceived health of a democracy. In Children in the Political System, Easton and Dennis argued that the diffuse support that they found among young children was a product of their political socialization experiences. By socializing individuals to hold supportive attitudes, the political system ensures its stability.

However, there is the claim that the masses are incapable--of processing the information, of making reasonable and rational decisions, and/ or of being motivated enough to act. Political theorists in the post-World War II era argued that participation must be limited if a democracy is to be stable. (See Dahl 1956, Berelson 1954; see the review of this literature in Pateman, 1970.) From their standpoint, "we can see that high levels of participation and interest are required from a minority of citizens only and, moreover, the apathy and disinterest of the majority play a valuable role in maintaining the stability of the system as a whole" (Pateman, 1970, p. 7). In

Schumpeter's view for example, democracy refers to a method by which individuals compete in elections for power to make policy decisions. Participation is limited to voting, and "[a]ll that is entailed is that enough citizens participate to keep the electoral machinery -- the institutional arrangements -- working satisfactorily" (Pateman 1970, 5).

Empirical political scientists supported these arguments by supplying the evidence that the masses were incapable of understanding the complex political world or that they simply lacked any motivation to do so. According to countless surveys spread over five decades, Americans are in fact indifferent to much that transpires in politics, hazy about many of its principal players, lackadaisical regarding debates that preoccupy Washington, ignorant of basic facts that the well-informed take for granted, and unsure about the policies advanced by presidents and presidential hopefuls (Kinder, 1983). (See also Kinder and Sears, 1983.)

Converse (1964) provides the seminal statement on the lack of political sophistication in the masses. In "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" he offers evidence of the ideological innocence, instability, and lack of constraint in mass political attitudes, concluding that "dramatic, perhaps unbridgeable, differences divided elites from masses" (Kinder 1983, 392). In part this is due to the complexity of politics and the ambiguity cultivated by politicians. "It is nevertheless true that the events of political life are, for most Americans, most of the time, peripheral curiosities" (Kinder 1983, 390).

This innocence and lack of sophistication are not necessarily a hindrance to democracy. As noted above, many political philosophers, political scientists, and politicians believed that it was important to keep the masses out of politics and to maintain an underlying, stabilizing consensus of diffuse support, faith in the system, and trust in the authorities. Nevertheless, the decline of trust in government by the masses, as measured in public opinion polls across the 1960s and 70s, seemed to signal a crisis to many political scientists and politicians.

In the 1970s, political scientists and politicians alike bemoaned the perceived decline in trust among the masses, and they argued that the political system was in jeopardy. The concern was and is that the link between the governed and the governors is weak. This weakness, sometimes referred to as a "malaise" or a "crisis of confidence," is perceived as a threat to the stability of the political system.

The central issue is the role of the individual in a democratic polity. What makes a good citizen? Should individuals pay attention to politics or trust that their leaders are benevolent? Is the health of the political system threatened or strengthened by low levels of trust? Is it important that individuals feel that they can participate meaningfully in politics?

Trust in Government: The Miller-Citrin Debate

The exchange between Arthur Miller and Jack Citrin on the relevance of the measured decline in trust highlights some key issues for representative democracy. Miller argues that the decline in levels of trust across 1964 to 1970 indicate that American democracy is in crisis. The maintenance of high levels of support is key to the survival of a democracy. In theory this lack of trust is an indication of support for the whole political system and its decline indicates that people no longer have faith in the system. In addition, it seems likely to Miller that those who have low levels of trust may engage in counter-system behavior. Citrin responds that the decline in levels of trust is more a function of ritualistic cynicism, or perhaps of a lack of trust in incumbents. He argues that it should not be taken to mean that the system has failed. Furthermore, it is not clear that these attitudes are tied to behavior in any way.

In the dialogue between Citrin and Miller some key points about the nature of trust

emerge. First and foremost is the role of trust in a democracy. Neither author suggests that trust is unimportant. What they differ on is their explanation of what a lack of trust indicates. It may be that individuals do not trust the political system; it may be that they do not like the incumbents or a particular set of policy outputs. It becomes important to distinguish between trust in government and perceived responsiveness of government, and then further to distinguish between these and internal or personal political efficacy.[1]

The point to be made about links to participation can be a bit confusing. Miller suggest that people with low levels of trust (assumed to mean low levels of system support) pose a threat. They may engage in anti-system behaviors. Citrin responds that no clear link to behavior (actual or potential) has been shown. Certainly it makes sense that the attitudes may become much more significant if they are linked to behaviors (whether pro or anti- system). However, if the assumptions are that the masses should not be and are not likely to be active, and that the legitimacy of the regime rests on the trust and support of the masses, then perhaps the proper attitudes are important even without the links to political behavior.

Citrin's point about ritualistic cynicism is very important. He suggests that there has always been an element of cynicism and skepticism about politics in American political life. This is part of the American heritage. Cynicism is what keeps citizens on their toes and forces politicians to pay attention to the wishes of constituents. Paul Sniderman's A Question of Loyalty (1981) goes a step further. It is not just that there is a role for (and a tradition of) ritualistic cynicism in the United States; it is that a certain amount of skepticism is important in any democratic process. Sniderman surveyed residents of the San Francisco Bay Area in an

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[1] Iyengar, in his "Subjective Political Efficacy as a Measure of Diffuse Support" examines differences between measure of trust and measures of external political efficacy (the responsiveness of the political system). Iyengar shows that the trust measures are closely tied to affect towards incumbents and therefore seem unlikely to be good measures of diffuse support.

attempt to qualify the types of trust and distrust that could be found in the American public. He argues that people fall into four types with regard to the attitude Trust in Government. There are those who trust who can be classified as Committed or Supportive, and there are those whose basic attitude is distrust and are categorized as either Disaffected or Disenchanted. The distinction between Committed and Supportive and between Disaffected and Disenchanted is in the quality of the judgement; in both cases people in the former category are not making balanced judgements and those in the latter category are.

Sniderman argues that allegiance may be just as bad for democracy as is alienation, and alienation just as good for democracy as allegiance is supposed to be. It is a question of how evaluations are being made. Fundamentally, it may be that it is not trust that is good for democracy, but a healthy skepticism. The Committed and the Supportive are both allegiant, but the Committed do not temper their allegiance to the government. While acknowledging that allegiance is important, Sniderman argues that those "who refuse to acknowledge the inevitable imperfections of government, whose allegiance is without qualification or reservation, may pose as serious a threat as the most embittered to a democratic political order.(45)

Both the Disenchanted and the Disaffected are alienated and cynical, but Sniderman argues that they are alienated in different ways. Specifically, the Disenchanted are more given to deliberation and less likely to engage in anti-system activity. Sniderman discusses the link to participation (or potential participation) and makes a distinction between two types of protest activity. While acknowledging that trust in the political institutions is important in a democratic society, Sniderman goes on to argue that "a democratic society also depends on opposition. It need not tolerate all forms of challenge, but it surely must put up with disapproval of the government. The question, then, is not whether citizens may disapprove but what form their disapproval may take." (Sniderman 47) He distinguishes between advocacy protest, in which

individuals attempt to address some injustice but do not challenge the authority of the state, and adversary protest, in which individuals are challenging the political system.

The importance of the distinction should be clear. A decline in trust is a problem for the political system if it is tied to the latter but not the former, and it seems clear that the measures of trust are more likely to be tied to evaluations of incumbents, the political parties, or policies (see Citrin). Furthermore, it is, according to Sniderman's evidence, the Disaffected who are most likely to engage in protest activity. The Disenchanted are not much more likely to engage in anti-system activity than are either class of allegiant citizens. However, Sniderman goes on to show that all types of protest measured seem to be correlated with each other; if one engages in a peaceful protest, easily tolerated by the political system, then one is more likely to engage in adversarial (anti-system) politics.[2]

When combined with Sniderman's findings, both Miller and Citrin seem to be partially right. Citrin is correct to say that there is no necessary link between cynicism and adversarial protest. However, Miller is obviously correct to be concerned if those who register distrust and engage in any type of protest activity are more likely to engage in anti-system activity. We will argue that some level of distrust is good for the political system. When it is tied to higher levels of political efficacy, it is likely to encourage citizens to be more attentive to

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[2] Sniderman introduces what he calls "The Idea of America" to refer to his finding that Americans cannot see themselves as anything else. Whatever distrust or cynicism is being expressed, it is tied to a fundamental belief that there is no better political system to turn to. This possibility was raised by Citrin, and Sniderman finds empirical evidence to support it.

politics. then, following Sniderman's argument, it seems likely that individuals who are somewhat cynical will be more likely to make better -- more thoughtful-- judgements about politics.

Internal Efficacy

Political efficacy as originally conceived included the attitude which we now call political trust (external efficacy), as well as a sense of personal competence in political matters. There are "two separate components: (1) internal efficacy, referring to beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics, and (2) external efficacy, referring to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands" (Niemi et al, 1407-1408). Almond and Verba phrase this distinction in terms of influence: "If the individual can exert such influence (over policy makers), we shall consider him to be politically competent; or if he believes he can exert such influence, we shall view him as subjectively competent." (Almond and Verba 137) They go on to describe this as a difference between "citizen competence" and "subject competence," a distinction which may be useful to keep in mind. (see above cites)

Individuals, then, may believe themselves competent as citizens or as subjects. As competent citizens, they perceive themselves as able to affect governmental decisions through political influence: by forming groups, by threatening the withdrawal of their vote or other reprisals. As competent subjects, they perceive themselves as able to appeal to a set of regular and orderly rules in their dealings with administrative officials. They will receive fair treatment from the administration, and their point of view will be considered, not because they attempt political influence, but because the administrative official is controlled by a set of rules that curbs his arbitrary power (Almond and Verba 171).

As noted above, Iyengar, drawing on Easton and Dennis explains that "[d]iffuse support encompasses affect for the entire political system, affect which is not contingent upon specific rewards or deprivations." Both political (external) efficacy and trust have been used to measure diffuse support. Iyengar distinguishes between the two, using efficacy to mean responsiveness and trust as a measure of support for incumbents. Either the attitudes are assumed to be a product of early socialization, independent of day-to-day political outcomes and are assumed to persist until adulthood, or they are contingent on incumbent evaluations.

The role of internal efficacy in democratic politics is a different story. Political scientists have generally conceived of internal efficacy (sometimes political competence) as one of the important independent variables in any discussion of participation. Its primary role is to separate out those who feel as if they have the ability to engage in political activity form those who fell that they themselves lack that ability (Barnes & Kasse, 1979; Crotty, 1991).

Blending of Internal Efficacy and Trust

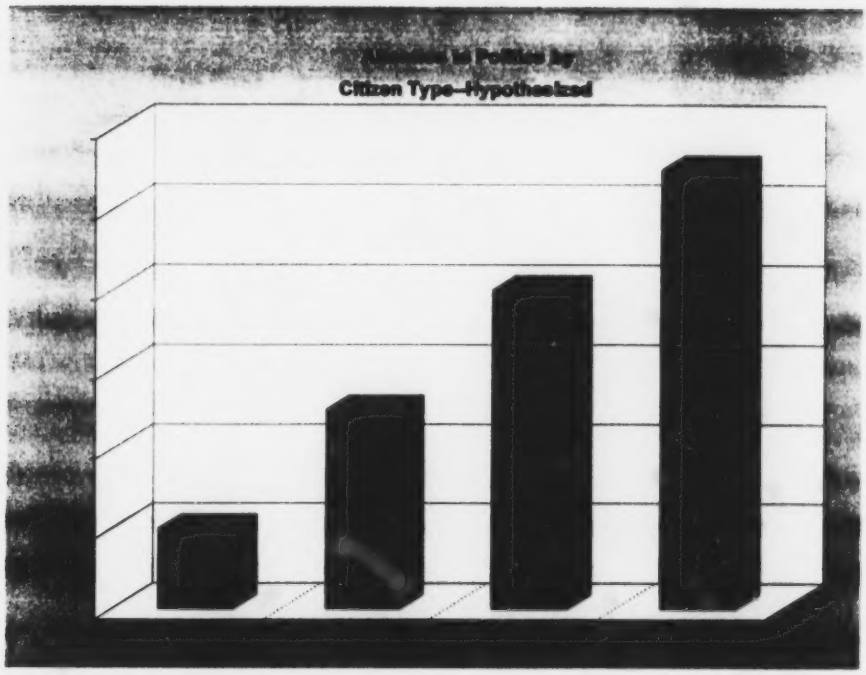
The central question which we are addressing is "to what extent do variances in trust, when coupled with variances in internal efficacy, influence the amount of attention that an individual is likely to pay to the political world?" The assumption has been that high levels of trust among the masses are good for democracy; we are suggesting that this may not be true. Rather, higher levels of trust lead the individual to be less wary of politicians and to pay less attention to the political world. We hypothesize that the most attentive citizens (and therefore, it is argued, the "best") are those with higher levels of (internal or personal) political efficacy and lower levels of trust. Those who trust and are efficacious, the traditional "good citizen", should be attentive, but not as attentive as those who are more skeptical. Those who have low levels of efficacy, but a "healthy" lack of trust for the government should be relatively less attentive

than high efficacy individuals. The least attentive, most apathetic citizens should be those with low levels of efficacy and high levels of trust.

The Current Study

We expect an individual's level of trust in government to modify the impact of internal efficacy on an individual's attention to politics. All else equal, attention to politics should be positively related to internal efficacy. The more competent one feels to influence political matters, the more likely one is to attend to those matters, and vice versa. However, the level of trust one has in the government should modify this relationship. Those who distrust the government should feel compelled to monitor political activities more closely than those who are relatively trusting. This means that, while those high in internal efficacy will always pay more attention to politics than those low in efficacy, a low level of trust will cause members of either group to pay relatively more attention to politics than those high in trust.

By crossing internal efficacy and trust, each with two levels (low and high), we derive four citizen types. Those high in internal efficacy, but low in trust are "Wary Monitors." Their attention to politics should be highest among the four citizen types. Next highest will be those high in efficacy but also high in trust, the "Satisfied Citizens." Among those low in efficacy, individuals also low in trust we call "Suspicious Uncertains." Their level of attention should be significantly lower than either of the first two groups, but higher than that for low efficacy/high trust people, the "Contented Complacents." Depicted graphically, the relationships we expect to observe are as follows:



We tested our hypotheses using data from National Election Study surveys for each presidential election year from 1980 through 1992 (Cumulative data file #....). Responses to internal efficacy and trust in government items were used to identify each respondent exclusively as one of our four citizen types. A variety of such items are available. We created a five point (0-4) internal efficacy index using responses to two statements: "People like me have no say in politics," and "Politics is too complicated for someone like me to understand." Subjects scoring 0-1 were categorized as "low" and those 3-4 as "high." Midpoint responses were discarded. For the trust dimension we used a summary index item that combines responses to a series of questions such as "How often can you trust the government in Washington to do what's right?" Subjects were categorized as "high" or "low." A new variable, "Citizen type" was then created using the two dimensions.

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Attention to politics was measured using four NES items. One measures interest in politics by simply asking respondents to characterize how often they follow public affairs using a four-point scale from "Hardly at all" to Most of the Time." A five point media exposure scale measures how many of the four mass media a respondent utilized to monitor the campaign. Finally, two items ask about a respondent's weekly news consumption; one question concerns newspaper reading, the other television watching. This range of measures should provide a detailed account of the way attention to politics varies among our citizen types. The original NES questions are provided in the appendix.

One of the first steps taken to analyze these data was to profile our citizen types. We wondered if they would correlate to any significant degree with demographic or political measures. We looked at the dimensions of sex, race, education and partisanship. Neither race nor partisanship bore any particular relationship to citizen types. Across the entire NES sample, approximately 85% of respondents were white and 12% black. None of our citizen types deviated significantly from those proportions. The same held for partisanship, where about 50% of the sample was Democrat, 38% Republican and 12% Independent. Both sex and education displayed interesting, but unsurprising patterns, both tied to internal efficacy. Those types high in efficacy (Wary Monitors and Satisfied Citizens) were also highly educated (70% and 65% at least college educated, respectively). The low efficacy types had noticeably less formal education (29% college or more for Suspicious Insecures, 24% for Contented Complacents). That more education should enhance confidence regarding political matters is expected. Patterns between the sexes indicate that disparate socialization continues to open gaps between men and women where efficacy is concerned. There was a significantly higher concentration of men among our high efficacy types (55% for Wary Monitors, 54% for Satisfied Citizens), than women, and vice versa for low efficacy types (Suspicious Insecures were 58% female,

Contented Complacents). Neither sex nor education correlated with the second dimension defining our citizen types, trust.

The relationship between the citizen types and attention to politics was assessed by comparing mean attention level (for each of the four measures) across the four citizen types. Variation among the types was detailed using one-way analysis of variance. This included estimation of the significance of differences between mean pairings (Contented Complacents versus Suspicious Insecures, e.g.). Observations were weighted to account for the variety of surveys utilized.

The essentials of our hypotheses are consistently supported. For every measure of attention to politics the relationship between the four types and attention is as predicted. That is, no matter the measure, Wary Monitors pay the most attention to politics, followed in order by Satisfied Citizens, Suspicious Insecures and Contented Complacents. One-way analysis of variance indicates the variation among our citizen types is statistically significant for all but the measure of television news watching (Tables 1-4). Mean differences are highly significant between either of the two high efficacy groups and two low efficacy groups, again with the partial exception of television news watching. There the gap between Satisfied Citizens and both low efficacy types is insignificant (Table 4). Thus the impact of internal efficacy on political attention is, for the most part, clearly and strongly demonstrated.

The hypothesized impact of trust on political attention is supported by the direction of our findings, illustrated most clearly by the bar charts in Figures I-IV. However, only for the dependent measure of interest in politics is variation between types while holding internal efficacy constant statistically significant. For that measure, Contented Complacents ($m = 2.36$) gave significantly less attention to politics than Suspicious Insecures ($m = 2.48$).

Table 1
Oneway Analysis of Variance

Dependent Variable: Interest in Public Affairs Factor: Citizen Type

Source	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	Prob.
Between	428.76	142.92	161.09	.00
Within	3054.68	.89		
Total	3483.44			

Group Means (* = difference between two means significant at p = .05 (LSD test))

	Contented Complacents m = 2.36	Suspicious Insecures m = 2.48	Satisfied Citizens m = 3.13	Wary Monitors m = 3.19
CC	na			
SI	*	na		
SC	*	*	na	
WM	*	*		na

Figure I
Public Affairs Interest by Citizen Type

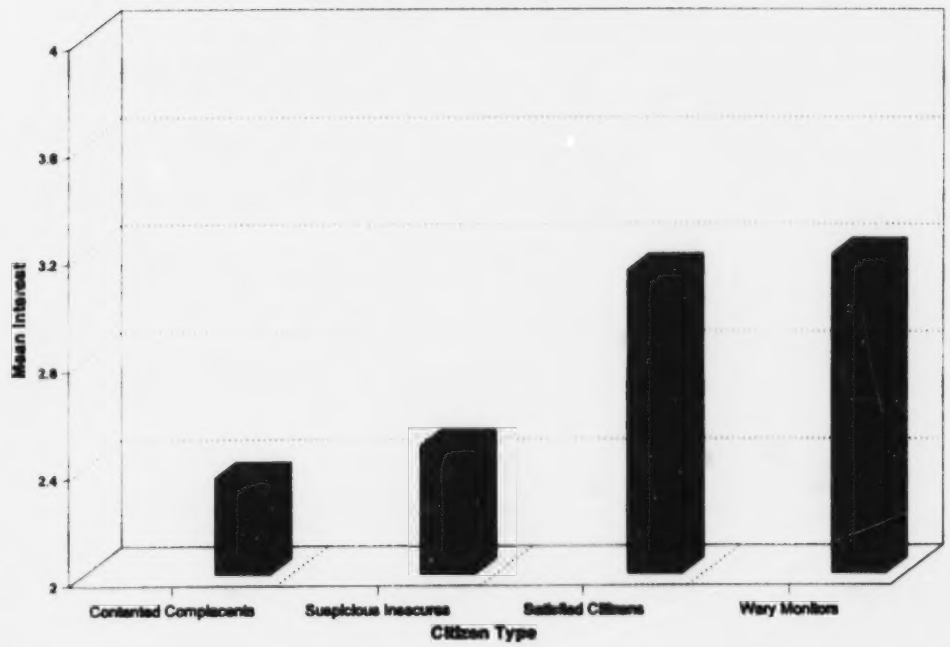

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Table 2

Oneway Analysis of Variance

Dependent Variable: Media Exposure Factor: Citizen Type

Source	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	Prob.
Between	376.66	125.55	108.71	.00
Within	2932.36	1.15		
Total	3309.02			

Group Means (* = difference between two means significant at p = .05 (LSD test))

	Contented Complacents m = 2.76	Suspicious Insecures m = 2.86	Satisfied Citizens m = 3.58	Wary Monitors m = 3.63
CC	na			
SI		na		
SC	*	*	na	
WM	*	*		na

Figure II

Media Exposure by Citizen Type

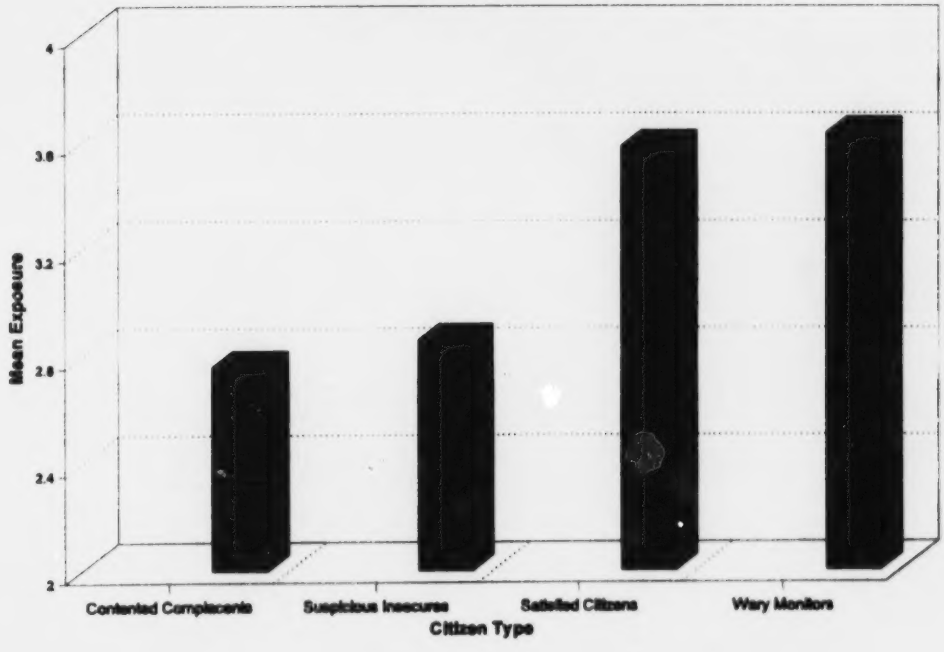

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Table 3

Oneway Analysis of Variance

Dependent Variable: Days Read Newspaper Factor: Citizen Type

Source	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	Prob.
Between	514.01	171.34	19.91	.00
Within	23560.94	8.61		
Total	24074.96			

Group Means (* = difference between two means significant at p = .05 (LSD test))

	Contented Complacents m = 3.47	Suspicious Insecures m = 3.62	Satisfied Citizens m = 4.32	Wary Monitors m = 4.54
CC	na			
SI		na		
SC	*	*	na	
WM	*	*		na

Figure III

Newspaper Reading by Citizen Type

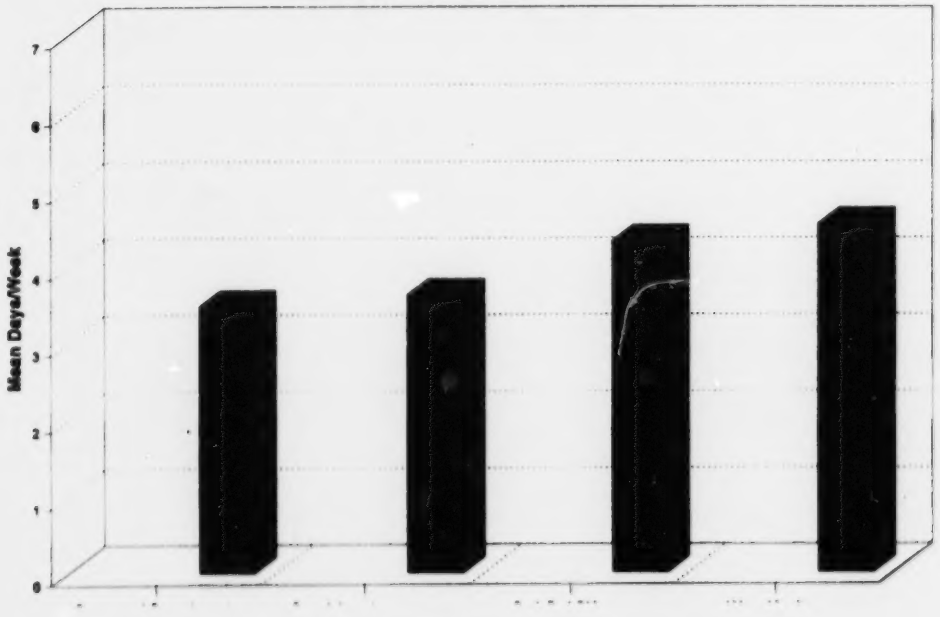

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Table 4

Oneway Analysis of Variance

Dependent Variable: Days Watched TV News Factor: Citizen Type

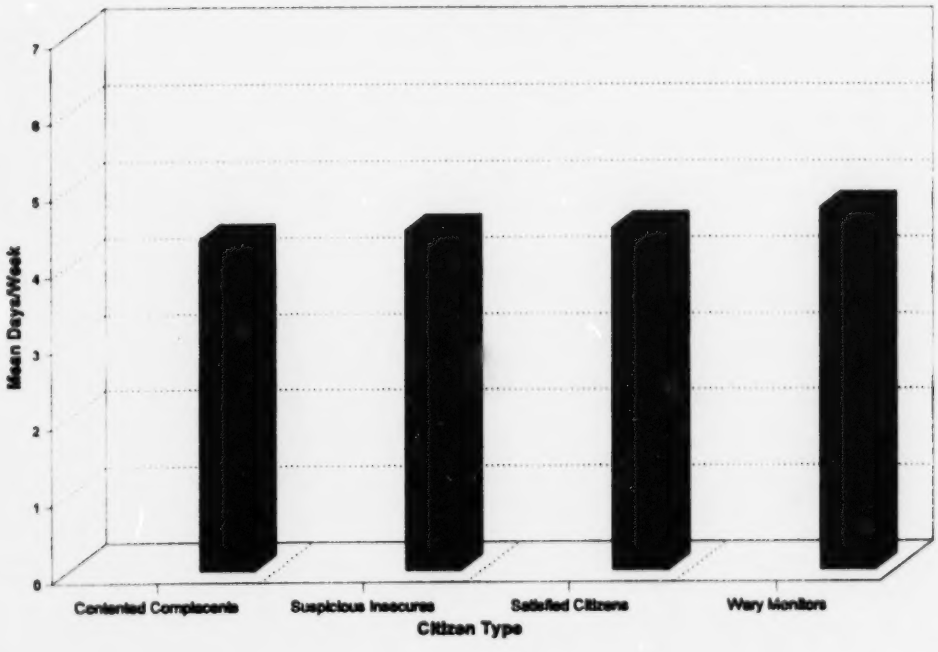
Source	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	Prob.
Between	49.92	16.64	2.37	,07
Within	19192.95	7.03		
Total	19242.86			

Group Means (* = difference between two means significant at p = .05 (LSD test))

	Contented Complacents m = 4.33	Suspicious Insecures m = 4.45	Satisfied Citizens m = 4.48	Wary Monitors m = 4.74
CC	na			
SI		na		
SC			na	
WM	*	*		na

Figure IV

TV News Watching by Citizen Type



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Discussion/ Summary/ Concluding Points

Altogether, these results suggest the primary impact of an individual's feelings of competence concerning political affairs on attention to political information. Feeling confident leads to increased attention; unfortunately, feeling less than confident appears to inhibit the impulse to monitor political events. This means that for reasons of education or biology--both clearly and causally related to internal efficacy--individuals may enter a relatively closed loop where low efficacy inhibits attention, which restricts knowledge, which in turn undercuts efficacy.

We're obliged to acknowledge the possibility that, for any one individual, the initial causal direction may be from attention to efficacy. That is, a person may not feel efficacious unless and until he or she pays some minimum threshold level of attention to political affairs. Causality could just as naturally run the other way, due to socialization. Raised by politically conscious parents,

for example, a child may develop with an essentially intuitive sense of confidence about political matters which makes the mass mediated world of politics significantly less threatening than it might be to the uninitiated. In any case, it's certain that the relationship between efficacy and attention, once set in motion, is circular. So, for efficacy to be maintained, it must be fed by attention to politics; yet, without some sense of confidence to begin with, attention will not follow.

One's level of trust in government may modify the relationship between internal efficacy and attention; it certainly does for one measure of attention, interest in politics.. But beyond that--for measures of media exposure, newspaper reading or television news watching--its impact is suggestive but inconclusive. The validity of these various measures is an obvious place to start in coming to grips with these results. We applied our types to a range of measures precisely to observe what manner of variation emerged. In the main, the measures tell the same

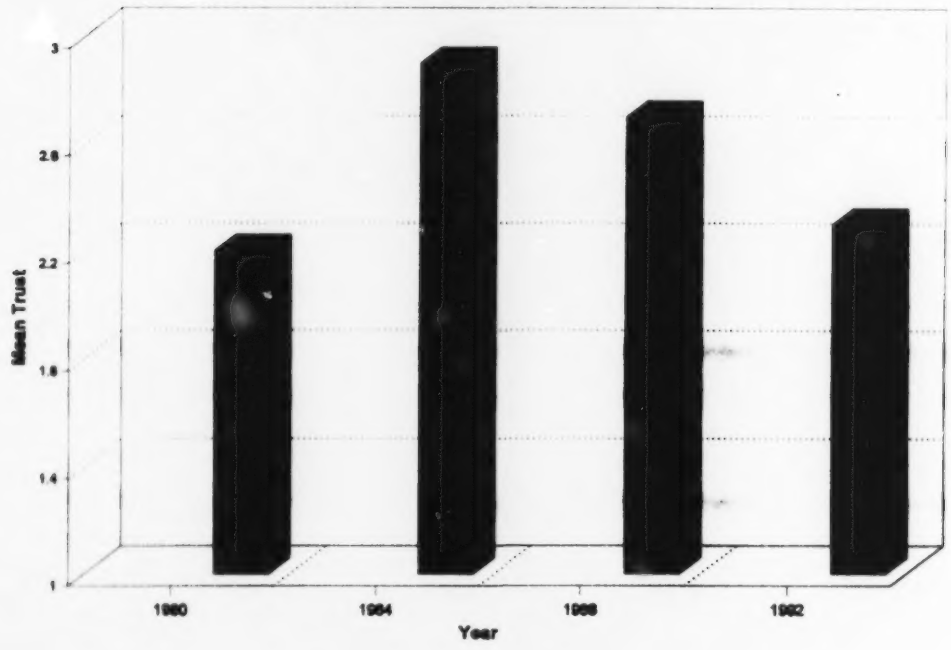
story. But interest in politics is something of an exception. Why? While the various dependent measures are all correlated with one another, the interest in politics variable is measuring something distinctly different from the remaining measures. The other three all focus specifically on an individual's exposure to mass mediated programming or writing. They measure an individual's mass media consumption habits. While the focus of the media exposure measure was the presidential campaigns, these variables ultimately still measure something approximating but not meeting our understanding of political attention. The interest in politics item seems the most valid measure of our dependent variable because it asks the respondent to characterize the extent to which he or she follows politics. We are encouraged by the fact that this measure most clearly supported our expectations.

What does any of this say about the health of the U.S. democracy? The suggestion has been--from political scientists, politicians and pundits--that high levels of cynicism (or low levels of trust), indicate that the American political system is in some sort of crisis . But why? What is the link between cynicism and behavior? One answer is that cynicism makes protest activity more likely, an argument made by Sniderman (1981) with regard particularly to the class of individuals he labels "disaffected". But Sniderman suggests it is not the cynicism or alienation that is the problem; it is the lack of balance, a lack also found among some of those he labels "allegiants".

If Sniderman is correct, then distrust's behavioral consequences are not necessarily all bad. This is precisely the point we make in this study. We argue that attention to politics--normatively a good thing--increases with levels of political efficacy, also normatively a good thing in many versions of democratic theory. But we further argue that attention increases with cynicism--argued by most democratic citizens to be a bad thing. While those arguments were not unequivocally supported by the data herein, the movement across categories does appear to be in the right direction.

Figure V

Trust in Government, 1980-1992



One final, anecdotal point. In 1992, voter trust in government was very low (See Figure V). If low levels of trust lead to relatively high levels of attention, then how might that have been manifested in 1992? We speculate that the dramatically increased range of choices available to voters in a variety of ways, from candidates (Ross Perot, e.g.) to media sources (Larry King, e.g.) was at least in part due to citizens attending more intensely to political events. And in fact interest in politics was at a four-year high in 1992 (Figure VI). The system adapts when enough citizens feel strongly enough about something. Distrust of traditional parties, candidates and

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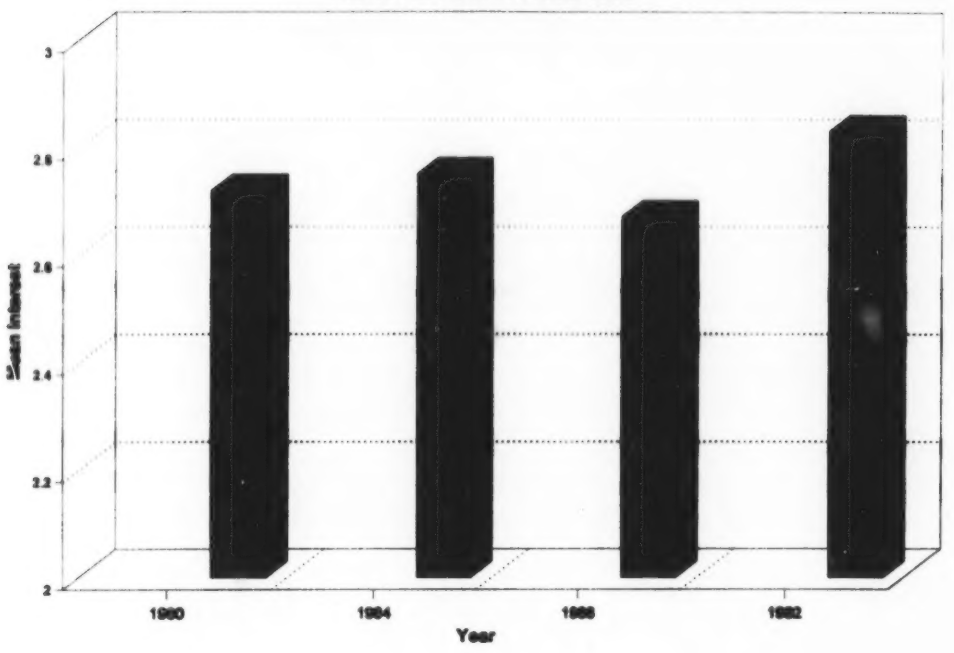
Figure VI

Interest in Politics, 1980-1992



media will not generate any change unless it is followed by something: paying enough attention to politics that political and media elites become aware that someone is not only unhappy, but that someone is also watching. Caveat civitas.

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APPENDIX

V613: Internal Efficacy--No Say
(following intro statement saying that statements are going to be read and R is asked if R agrees or disagrees -- do you want the text?)

"People like me don't have any say about what the government does."
1. agree
2. disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
9. DK ...
0. NA; INAP ...

V614: Internal Efficacy--Too Complicated
(same format as 613)

"Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on."

V647: Trust in Government index: 5-Pt Scale Categorized.
constructed from file vars 604-606, 608 as a guttman scale.

1. Most cynical
2
3. Most trusting
9. Not scored
0. INAP...

V604: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the govt in Wash to do what is right -- just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?"
V605: " Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?"
V606: "Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, some of it, or don't waste very much of it?"
V608: "Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?")

V313: Interest in Public Affairs

Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?

1. Hardly at all
2. Only now and then
3. Some of the time
4. Most of the time
9. DK
0. NA; INAP, no post IW...

V728: Campaign Media Exposure Count

vars 724-727, summing # of yes answers, plus 1.

1. No media
2
3
4
5. All four media

V724: Did you watch any programs about the campaigns on television?
V725: Did you listen to any speeches or discussions about the campaign on the radio?
V726. Did you read about the campaign in any magazines?
V727. Did you read about the campaign in any newspapers?

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